

Chicana Punk Rock in East Los Angeles: Creating a New Transnational Identity

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INTRODUCTION

This research examines the emergence of an important punk rock artist in East Los Angeles in the 1970s, Alicia Armendariz, and the contemporary continuation of her legacy portrayed in the film *Los Punks*, as cultural responses to the demands of a mainstream American society, the expectations of their Mexican and Latina/o parents, and the social and economic pressures faced by Chicana/o youth. Alicia Armendariz, aka Alice Bag, is a U.S. citizen born to Mexican-born parents, who joined the punk rock scene in East L.A. in the early 1970s. Her memoir of becoming a punk rocker, *Violence Girl*, is the subject of Chapter One of this thesis. Chapter Two focuses on the Netflix documentary, *Los Punks: We Are All We Have* (2016). Chapter Three considers Armendariz's self-presentation in a series of interviews, both from the 1970s and more recently. This study analyzes her contributions to the punk rock scene to argue that she became a transnational subject. I also analyze the punk rock movement of today in Los Angeles to argue that it has retained original punk characteristics and continues to be diverse and inclusive, and argue that Chicana rockers like Armendariz were pioneers for this continuum. The Netflix documentary, *Los Punks: We Are All We Have* (2016) exhibits similar challenges that minorities face, especially Hispanics, all who use punk rock as an emotional and sometimes political outlet, just as rockers did in the 1970s.

The questions this study asks include: How did the life experience of Alicia Armendariz in East Los Angeles of the 1970s impact her sense of ethnic, national, and gender identity? What was unique about her contribution to the punk rock scene? Was that contribution enduring, that is, can we still see it today in contemporary Chicana/o punk rock? There exist little substantial analyses of Chicana punk rockers such as Alicia Armendariz and Teresa Covarrubias, yet given the long history of Chicanas/os in the U.S., it is important to analyze and highlight the many

specific Chicana/o cultural forms that exist. Doing so allows us to understand how many Chicanas/os and Latinas/os participate in U.S. cultures and cultures of their home countries in ways that contribute to the creation of transnational cultures. This project examines how Armendariz's attitudes about gender, ethnicity, and national identity changed through her involvement in the punk rock movement in East Los Angeles in the 1970s.

I look at these questions with a wide scope. I utilize interviews of Alice Bag in print and in video to analyze her perspective on her entrance and experience in the scene to argue how she not only created a new transnational identity but set a precedent for the inclusive, diverse punk rock scene in L.A. which we still see today. By using sources regarding Latino music theory, transnational theory, and historical accounts, I have a comprehensive analytical and historical approach to my questions. I analyze the documentary by comparing it to the early punk rock scene and have found similar occurrences such as ethnic backgrounds and motivations for joining. I use reviews by viewers and film critics to anchor my analysis. In doing so, I can compare figures in the documentary to the main actors of the initial punk rock scene where I will argue that the similarities represent how Alice Bag precedent allowed this continuum to exist.

A review of the secondary literature on Latina/o musics, transnational theory, and history of Chicanas/os in Los Angeles provides an analytical and historical foundation for understanding Armendariz's memoir, the documentary film, and her interviews. Reviews of the documentary provide greater information on how the film and its subjects are viewed by varied audiences, and my analysis both finds support in some of these reviews and take issue with other aspects of them.

My results include finding that Alice Bag did, in fact, create her own sense of transnationalism through her experience participating in the early punk rock scene of Los

Angeles. I have found she chose to exhibit parts of her parents' perceptions of their Mexican-American identities, which include being proud of her Mexican heritage through trips to Mexico, choosing to speak Spanish in a monolingual country, and believing in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith. However, I found that she chose to challenge other elements and replace them with her own perception, such as rejecting her father's machismo in his abuse of Armendariz's mother, being open to non-hetero sexualities and genders, and choosing to surround herself with strong, independent women in the music scene. It is through this that I argue that she is a transnational subject, exhibiting a "third" cultural identity, because while she retains ties to the country of her parents, she develops new attitudes and perspectives that she chooses to exhibit as a Chicana in the United States.

In this research, I also found that many original punk rock characteristics have been conserved in Los Angeles over time, best displayed by the Netflix documentary *Los Punks: We Are All We Have* (2016). These include a rebellious, punk attitude, aggressive performances, a sense of community and mutual support system established, and a firm defense of the scene in the face of adversity. I argue that Armendariz contributed to this continuum as shown by her participation as a Chicana in the nascent scene. In my discussion of the documentary, I also aim to dispel certain stereotypes of Hispanics in Los Angeles, which are demonstrated by Dennis Harvey and Alystar McKenneh-O'Neil.

Social and Historical Context – Chicana/o Los Angeles

It is important to understand the historical context that can explain the emergence of actors such as Alicia Armendariz. Many of the challenges that she faced while growing up with Mexican-born parents, and as a brown girl in a school system dominated by whites, were issues

that motivated the emergence of the Chicano movement in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the movement, Chicanos demanded civil rights, better quality education, better working conditions in the fields, voter rights, and other important social and political issues at the time. The documentary film “Chicano!” outlines in four sections the history of Mexican-Americans in California, firstly describing the leader of the land grant movement, Lopez Tijerina, who attempted to convince the federal government to uphold the Treaty of Guadalupe (1848) which ensured Mexicans living on Mexican land ceded to the U.S. would retain their property rights. It also describes Rodolfo Gonzales, who founded the Crusade for Justice in Denver in 1966, and examines his appeal to Mexican-American youths, which inspired Chicano nationalism and a shared cultural identity among them. It is during this time that we see the emergence of “Aztlán,” or the mythical Chicano homeland, as an important object of shared Chicano cultural identity (NLCC Educational Media 1996).

In the 1960s, other groups became active such as the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, founded by César Chávez in 1962, and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations united in Texas in 1963. Chávez was a key leader in inspiring useful strategies for farmworker self-determination, including boycotts, fasts, and strikes, shown by his leadership in the national boycott against grape purchasers in 1965, who exploited Mexican-American workers in the field. He argued for nonviolent demonstration, and in 1966, him and the Farm Workers marched from Delano to Sacramento to demonstrate farmworker resistance (NLCC Educational Media 1996).

In part three of the documentary film, we see the emergence of young Chicano students who began demanding better quality education and the repeal of discriminatory policies that pushed Chicano students to work in the fields or drafting them into the Vietnam War. Various

schools performed “blow outs” by simply leaving the school during the day, including students from organizations such as the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). In 1968 in Los Angeles, more than 1000 students walked out of Abraham Lincoln High School. The catalysts for these explosive protests included the low rate of Chicanos graduating high school, few resources for Chicanos to attend university, and inadequate amounts of Mexican-American teachers. In protesting against the school board, these students attempted to gain support of their goals from outside their community, where they met with Robert Kennedy during his campaign in 1968, who wished to support these youths. Unfortunately, the students never truly saw their concerns addressed by the school board (NLCC Educational Media 1996).

The Brown Berets, a student organization with a more militant objective, formed in 1968 alongside the student organizations, and during this time many student leaders and activists were arrested for partaking in the protests. In the 1970s, other organizations of Chicanos across the country formed to defend rights such as La Raza Unida in Crystal City, Texas, in 1970. This group argued for more political rights among Chicanos, stemming from unequal voting rights and political power for Chicanos, and held a convention in 1972, before fragmenting into regional political activist groups. Farm workers continued negotiating contracts with grape growers in California after continued protests and strikes, and Chicanas begin to enter the movement to fight for specific rights related to the movement’s objectives (NLCC Educational Media 1996).

It is from the Chicana Feminist Movement that we can draw similarities to the experience of Alicia Armendariz as a Mexican-American in the late 1960s in Los Angeles. While Chicanos fought for social equality, autonomy, and ethnic consciousness, many Chicanas believed that the movement also needed to fight against patriarchal relations and the exclusion of women from

leadership positions in Chicano organizations. A Chicana feminist discourse emerged, provoking Chicanas to fight against the sexism and racism they faced, even within the Chicano Movement, and to fight against the stereotype that Mexican women stayed home, got married, and raised children. Many Chicanos were against this movement as they saw these new strong women as representing “la mala mujer”: aggressive, threatens the man, is promiscuous, and impious (García 26). This movement also developed independently from the Anglo women’s movement, because Chicana women believed they faced not only sexism but also racism, as they were brown-skinned. Chicanas wanted maternity leave, childcare, available contraception methods, bilingual social resources, and equality in the workforce (Nieto Gomez 53). Many Chicanas believed that writing about their experiences, such as in journals or memoirs, allowed them to “rebel” against society as they could be heard as a collective Chicana voice (Sanchez 66).

The issues of equality in the workforce, bilingual resources, conception options, and rebelling against the traditional view of the Mexican woman that were in circulation among Chicanas/os in Los Angeles also appear in Armendariz’s memoir of her life at that time in the 70s and 80s. She describes a childhood experience of seeing a Chicano protest in Los Angeles, and as she grows up, she faces similar struggles and rebels against them, too, though in a distinct way: through the punk rock scene (Armendariz 69-70). These political, economic and social movements perhaps open an avenue for Armendariz to enter into discussion of issues that continued to impact Chicanos and Chicanas in the 1980s. Armendariz defied the stereotype of the submissive, uneducated Mexican woman by forming an all-female punk rock band, and graduating from high school, and later, university. Though she did not participate in any protests or strikes as explained in her memoir, we can link the social and political sentiments of the Chicano movement to her motivations to enter the punk rock scene. While growing up, she

aspired to break the mold of the expectations of Mexican-American women, even if these were repeated and upheld in her own nuclear family (Armendariz 89).

In order to accurately understand Armendariz's entrance and experience in the punk rock scene of Los Angeles, it is important to have a basic understanding of the musical genre and movement of punk rock. To begin, punk rock is a musical form that emerged as a response to historical conditions, specifically in the working-class neighborhoods of London in the 1970s. As explained by Dick Hebdige, punk rock was a way for youths in London to challenge and resist against hegemonic "consensus" of British identity. These youths represented a subculture that was characterized by a unique aesthetic regarding clothing, dance, and musical styles. In this way, they were able to convey meaning that disrupted norms of society (Hebdige 213).

In the case of Alice Bag, punk rock began to emerge in the early 1970s in Los Angeles with a glam rock aesthetic, which was influenced by British artists such as David Bowie who defied traditional gender roles through extravagant costumes and makeup. It was in 1976 that many punk rock bands emerged in Los Angeles, such as The Weirdos, the Deadbeats, and Armendariz's band, The Bags. In this year and thereafter, various other punk rock scenes developed in other areas of California with bands such as the Circle Jerks and Black Flag, who demonstrated the emergence of "hardcore" punk rock. These rockers traditionally conveyed a more masculine energy and sported leather jackets and studded boots (Brockmeier 14-15).

When The Bags formed in 1976, they performed at a limited number of venues in Hollywood, California, as many clubs were not amenable to hosting punk rock bands whose gigs often ended in violence and destruction. Nonetheless, The Bags often performed at The Troubadour, a famous rock club in West Hollywood which opened in 1957. They played their first concert at The Masque in 1977, a small punk club in central Hollywood which only serviced

from 1977 to 1978. In Armendariz's memoir, she explains the closing of The Masque due to fire code violations, and explains the club's significance as their first venue. The band released their sole record in 1978 with Dangerhouse Records, and was featured in the documentary film "The Decline of Western Civilization" in 1981. However, as band members such as Pat Bag, Craig Lee, and Terry Graham later left the band to pursue other ventures. The Bags were considered officially disbanded by the early 1990s when Armendariz joined the all-female band Castration Squad in the 1980s.

Armendariz first performed as the lead singer for The Bags, and was the bass player for Castration Squad. Before the official creation of The Bags, Armendariz and fellow punk rocker Patricia Morrison (Patricia Bag), Margo Reyes, and herself developed a band they initially called Mascara, later called Femme Fatale, which developed into The Bags. She is also known for performing on stage with Alarms, The Boneheads, Swing Set, Cholita, and Cambridge Apostles (Bag 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The texts I focus on are *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage: a Chicana Punk Story* (2011) and *Los Punks: We Are All We Have* (2016). There have been several studies published on punk rock and feminist figures within rock movements, but none focus exclusively on Alicia Armendariz. Rather, all sources that include an analysis of Alice Bag mention her contributions in simply a paragraph or two. I have divided the review of sources into two major areas, beginning with those that pertain to the memoir, and those that pertain to the documentary. Within sources relating to the memoir, I have chosen to group them into those that relate to transnationalism, reviews focused on Alice Bag's contributions to the punk rock scene, those that

describe her life story, and reviews that analyze her anger on stage. Within sources relating to the documentary, I have chosen to group reviews and critical essays into three groups: those that relate to diversity in punk rock scene, sources that discuss social environments and backgrounds of those involved in punk rock, and those that highlight the sense of community among punk rockers. In general, the secondary literature on Alice Bag suggests that she is a key figure in early punk rock who defied stereotypes as a result of her childhood and participation in the punk rock scene as a Chicana.

Critics and reviewers have recognized Alice Bag as a transnational figure due to her exhibiting a duality of identities through the punk rock scene (Guzmán, “Makeovers and Misfits” and Haas, “Performing Folk Punk”). JJ Guzmán argues that Bag was one of the few and first female pioneers in the early punk scene in Los Angeles who contributed to a “transversal” and counter-cultural production to gender, class, and racial boundaries. Benjamin D. Haas discusses the inventiveness of punk rock as shown by Bag when she discusses the dualities of being both Mexican and American, and having a loving, yet abusive father which lead her to become an advocate for bilingual education and Chicana feminism. In viewing Alice Bag as a transnational subject, these reviewers offer commentaries which allow us to recognize Bag as both a true border crosser who pushed the boundaries of both musical and cultural identity.

Many critics have highlighted Bag’s important contributions and legacy as a Chicana and woman of color in the original punk rock scene (Sorensen, “Richard Hell’s DIY Subjects;” Daley, “Survive;” and Eversley and Habell-Pallán, “Introduction: the 1970’s”). Leif Sorensen views 1970s punk rockers as having the ability to liberate themselves through performances, which were alternative cultural spaces for countercultural aesthetics. Shelley Eversley and Michelle Habell-Pallán agree with the ability of an alternative cultural space to push boundaries,

where they tell us that Bag's fury on stage represented a place where few women had gone, which allows us to view Alice Bag as a precedent for diversity in the punk rock scene we see today. Chris Daley believes that the memoir shows the under-recognition of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in shaping the punk rock movement, where we can see Bag's memoir as a piece of evidence proving the positive contributions of people of color in American musical and artistic production.

Reviewers and critics recognize how Alice Bag's life story and childhood created motivations for her to join the punk rock scene (Roman, "Alice Bag's Memoir" and *Persephone Magazine*, "Bag It"). Gabriel Roman highlights the value of Bag's story of her childhood experiences and frustrations, which resulted in her participation in the punk rock scene. In my argument, this allows us to understand her entrance into the punk rock scene. A reviewer for *Persephone Magazine* agrees with Roman in stating that Bag's experiences with an abusive father and as a Chicana in a monolingual education system motivated her to join a rebellious yet accepting community. Roman's and *Persephone*'s commentaries help us understand why Bag may have chosen to join a scene which exhibited characteristics vastly different from what her parents expected from her.

Critics also acknowledge that Alice Bag's experience in the punk rock scene represented her attempts to carve out a space for Chicanas in society (Wiedlack 278; Habell-Pallán 158; and Alonso, "La Llorona"). Maria Wiedlack argues that Alice Bag's memoir uses the themes of class, sexuality, gender, and racialization to demonstrate the oppression she experienced as a child. Michelle Habell-Pallán responds to this commentary and believes that Bag found solace in the punk rock scene where she questioned traditional female roles in society. Rosie Alonso similarly offers her perspective that punk rock is an attitude of rebellion and chaos which brings

people of similar issues and backgrounds together to express their emotions, which again allows us to understand why Bag would join the punk rock scene.

I also analyze the documentary film “*Los Punks: We Are All We Have* (2016)” directed by Angela Boatwright. Many reviewers of the film agree that the contemporary punk rock scene is diverse and stands as a great sense of community for its rockers, many who come from disadvantaged circumstances (DeFore, “Los Punks;” Gardner, “San Antonio Cinefestival;” and McKenneh-O’Neil, “Slamdance”). Alystar McKenneh-O’Neil believes that the subjects represent a new generation of angry, hopeless, frustrated, impoverished kids, which presents us with a stereotype of these youths. John DeFore defies this, and explains that they are not all products of their negative environments when he notes that some of the rockers have immigrant parents from Latin American, are from middle-class families, or have an education and job. Kurt Gardner adds to this explanation by examining the lives of April, Nacho, Alex, Gary, which suggests that McKenneh-O’Neil’s assumption may be incorrect. However, neither discusses the problem of making a dichotomy among immigrants and their children, something less discussed in the immigrant community.

Critics, as well as the filmmaker herself, have commented on how *Los Punks* reveals to viewers a music “scene” that brings together Chicana/o youth who not only enjoy making their own music but also support each other through significant trials (J Bennett, “Los Punks” and Harvey, “Film Review”). Dennis Harvey suggests that the participants in Chicana/o punk rock scene represented in *Los Punks* can find in their musical project some alleviation from the stress of life in parts of the city where many people face severe economic and social pressures (“Film Review”). This may be one reason that some punk rockers object to the film, as Boatwright notes in an interview with J Bennett, that the spotlight on their daily lives feels, to some, too intimate

(J Bennett, “Los Punks”). This anxiety is not without basis given that both Harvey and McKenneh-O’Neil in their commentaries emphasize what the Chicana/o punk rockers don’t have rather than what they have, assuming that they are products of their socioeconomic environments. Harvey’s and Boatwright’s commentaries make us aware of some of both a Chicana/o contemporary punk rock scene, and the pressures it faces, even from those in musical circles to which they aspire. Jennie Kermode tells us that the sense of community helps these people economically, as some live together, and socially, as they have similar interests and backgrounds. She discusses the inclusivity of the contemporary punk rock scene in terms of sexuality and ability.

Many reviewers agree that the sense of community that the punk rockers gain from participating in the punk rock scene is beneficial for all (Roberts, “Los Punks;” Brunsting, “Joshua Reviews;” and Adams, “Los Punks”). Randall Roberts believes that punk rock brings like-minded people together to build a positive community. Joshua Brunsting discusses the strong bonds built by punk rockers, where for many, the scene is “home.” Laura Adams explains how the contemporary scene is a reason to continue living for many, and showcases the poverty and lacking social system that pushes some into the scene. These commentaries shed light on what motivates contemporary teens to join punk rock, and perceives it as positive for the youths who may come from disadvantaged situations.

Most of the reviews agree that the subjects of the contemporary punk rock scene come together to express their frustrations and to support each other. Only a few attempt to analyze the ethnic diversity of the scene which is clear in the film, and none compare it to Alice Bag or her generation. In my analysis, I focus on contemporary Chicana/o punk rockers as having much in common with Alice Bag. I compare the contemporary punk rock scene to that of the 1970s, and

argue that the scene did in fact morph and change into becoming more diverse and inclusive, although it retains elements and motivations of the original scene. In analyzing the current punk rock scene, I find that what Armendariz (Alice Bag) said about the punk rock scene being exclusive at the beginning and later becoming inclusive is true and is evidenced in a documentary of Alice Bag's home turf as recent as 2016.

I anchor my argument in both Gender Studies of music and Latino Studies of music, two disciplines that overlap in much of their literature. Since many of my sources come from Latino Theory, history, and analysis of music, I can situate my analysis in more than one literature from which it draws and to what it contributes. The majority of the sources of analysis for *Violence Girl* discuss Alice Bag's aggressive entrance into the punk rock scene as a result of her traumatic childhood and school years, and use specific examples from the memoir to highlight how being Mexican-American affected her outlook on the early scene. However, only a few praise her contributions to the scene as both a female and Mexican-American. Even fewer view her as someone breaking the male-dominated stereotype and societal gender expectations of being a Chicana. In my analysis, I further highlight Bag's contributions to the early punk rock scene of the 1970s in East L.A. by analyzing select passages from the memoir where she describes how she defied odds and broke boundaries to become one of the first female punk rockers in the U.S. Her contributions were some of the first to change the dynamics of the punk rock scene which began as reflecting the patriarchal and monolingual society in which she grew up.

Becoming a Chicana Transnational Feminist Musician

In *Violence Girl*, Alicia Armendariz narrates her upbringing in Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles in the 1970s by choosing to explain both positive and negative memories from her

childhood, which I believe support her position as a transnational subject. They are both fond and unfavorable: yearly trips to visit family in Mexico and the early inspiration for her own music, yet the abuse suffered by her mother at the hands of her father, and the discriminatory practices against speaking Spanish in elementary school. Through these memories, Armendariz creates a new transnational identity for herself, one that mixes the Mexican traditions that her parents attempt to instill in her, with the progressive sentiments and actions in joining the punk rock scene. While she maintains parts of her parents' traditions as Mexican immigrants such as her Spanish skills, she also challenges other parts of it, such as machismo, and rather embraces a new feminism in which her religion and sexuality differ vastly than her parents' perceptions of such. Throughout her experiences as a Chicana punk rocker, she led the way for the development of a new era of punk rock, reflected by her bold involvement and encouragement of a diverse punk rock scene that rebelled against the musical norms of the time.

ANALYSIS OF *VIOLENCE GIRL*

Contributions to the 1970s Scene

Alice Bag's participation in the punk rock scene as a transnational subject is a precedent for the diverse, inclusive scene it is today in Los Angeles. As a woman and person of color, she represents the diverse origins of punk rock, even though a sect morphed into the white male-dominated scene of 1980s. She set a precedent for the continuity of the aggressive and sometimes violent performances, and discusses her defense of the punk rock scene in the face of community and police resistance, which helped the scene create a community for its rockers, both still seen today in today's East L.A. punk scene.

Bag participated in the original punk rock scene in L.A., which was diverse and accepting of many backgrounds and ideologies. She describes it as the “island of misfit toys” where she found a type of kinship and community (189-190). She says that while punk rock boomed in New York City and more attention was on British bands (whose audiences were filled with white, young men), the scene in Los Angeles was inclusive, where “everyone could feel secure that his/her contribution was fairly received...were open to new ideas, friendly, cooperative... everyone felt like a rock star” (195). She notes that punk rock allowed rockers to reinvent themselves, and that what started as a new music style evolved into a “cultural revolution” and was “a catalyst for something big” where the L.A. scene specifically was “unconsciously egalitarian” (194).

I compare this description to what Bag describes as the punk rock scene in the late 1970s. She says “not everyone was welcomed. There were outsiders who were destined to remain outsiders, people who just didn’t get it. These people were shunned by the early punks because they held onto values from another time or because they tried to destroy what we saw as ours. Musically, the outsiders were slick musicians with new, ‘punk style’ haircuts, who wanted to take the music back to the studio heads (they were too school for cool); and anyone connected to the old music establishment” (234). Bag’s participation in the scene enacted the original punk aesthetic (“do-it-yourself,” without help of studios) and promoted equality and diversity among the rockers. The fact that she makes a clear distinction between her scene and other musical scenes in California at the time tells us that she had firmly established herself specifically in the punk rock scene of Hollywood. We can look to the emergence of the hardcore punk rock scene in the 1980s and compare its main characteristics to those of the original punk rock scene in which Bag participated. Alice Bag may be referring to the hardcore scene which developed in the

suburbs of Southern California in the late 1970s, which originated with bands such as Black Flag.

In comparison with the original scene, punks in this era represented a new aesthetic, the masculine and aggressive one to which Alice Bag refers above. One hardcore punk rocker, Jimmy Gestapo, argues that he got beat into Hardcore and says, “I got beat into shaving my head, putting boots on, and arming myself with a chain belt.” Judith Halberstam of “Female Masculinity” also argues that there was rampant sexism in punk rock during this era, and says, “women usually end up playing supporting roles rather than occupying center stage.” We can see this further from Laura Albert, a hardcore punk from the NYHC, who notes that the role of women in hardcore was the sexual outlet for the male rockers, and that women were not welcome in the bands nor in the mosh-pits of the audiences (Halberstam 1998). The hardcore scene was also dominated by white rockers, where Brockmeier notes it was a “white middle-class phenomenon” and categorizes the majority of hardcore bands as “white, rich, and male” (14-15).

Historically, we can see that a sect of the punk rock scene did morph and change into something much different than the original punk scene, but I argue that her participation in the origins of punk do show continuity in the East L.A. punk rock scene we see today. Though race, class, and gender manifested themselves differently in California hardcore, we can still see the continuity of other punk rock characteristics, such as the “do-it-yourself” tactics, where hardcore punks still made their own merchandise, independently learned to play their instruments, and performed not for solely economic reasons. Brockmeier tells us that hardcore punks did conserve the “punk ideology,” and hardcore punk historian Steven Brush notes that it “mimicked and

reacted to Punk; it appropriated some aspects yet discarded others. It reaffirmed the attitude” (Brockmeier 9). These characteristics still persist in East L.A. punk today.

During the early punk rock scene, Bag defends her “home turf” and says “When a bully targeted any of my girlfriends, I stepped in. My protective instincts went into high gear and my fists were swinging before I could think about it” (234). She later describes a new sect of punk filled with neo Nazis that resided in her apartment (290). She therefore contributed to preserving the original diverse punk rock scene by fighting against those in opposition of it. She took a stand against a sect of punk that was explicitly insulting, and she did her best to help pressure them out of that behavior. This defense of her scene tells us that she had developed a strong connection with it, which helps us to understand that her participation in the scene allowed her to become a precedent for original punk rock characteristics.

Another way she contributed to the punk rock scene was through her wild, sometimes destructive performances with The Bags. Her participation in these aggressive performances helped solidify one of punk rock’s core characteristics. She describes her first show:

“There’s too much energy in my body; I can’t control it... I can’t hear myself except for a ghost of a voice that seems to come from the back of the room; only it’s not a ghost, it’s me: That’s my voice shrieking, screaming, singing. The bag on my head makes me feel like I am protected, incognito, free to act without restraint.... I couldn’t stop myself now if I wanted and the release is like an exorcism- it feels so good...I explode like a broken piñata...” (212-213).

Bag compares herself to a ghost, to a piñata, to someone experiencing an exorcism, with electricity running through her. These super-human analogies show that she was not her normal self on stage as she transforms into Alice Bag, wearing a paper bag on her head. I argue that her performances, since she describes them in her memoir as almost out-of-body experiences, demonstrated the propagation of this core characteristic of punk.

In another passage, she discusses how The Bags became more aggressive in their performances. She says, “Our shows seemed to be a catalyst for fucked-up, angry teens who just needed a little encouragement to vent... These audiences were frequently out of control, whipped up into a frenzy by the music and my exhortations to release the inner beast” (283). She describes how she wanted audience members to feel complete freedom from conventions and rules through a “mass catharsis.” Here, we can see aggression throughout many of The Bag’s performances, but we can also see the audience’s role in the punk rock scene. Audience participation during gigs is fundamental to the punk rock scene, so since she made a point to connect with the audience at every gig, we can see that she contributed to the solidifying of this characteristic of punk rock. She later describes herself “like a fighter in the ring... full of adrenaline and fire...” and she urges them to engage with her. She wants to shake them up, causing them to explode, and they are “all dancing in unison” (6-7). She asks the reader, “How did I come to unleash the wrath of Kali upon the world of punk?” (7).

The fact that she once again describes a moment of pure aggression on stage, even comparing herself to Kali, shows us how crucial this aspect was to the original punk scene. Her mention of the ability to express herself freely tells us from a firsthand expert’s account that the original punk scene embodied and supported this. These characteristics of punk rock have continued in to what we can see today in the documentary *Los Punks*. She ignited her audience to feel the same way as she did, which later led to The Bags booking more shows and gaining more fans. Her contributions through the violent persona of Alice Bag on stage encouraged and defended the diverse, inclusive scene of early punk against punk rock’s later form.

Another way in which Bag’s participation in The Bags contributed to the development of the original punk rock scene is through her response to widespread resistance of punk rock. She

describes a show at The Troubadour when her boyfriend Nickey Beat and an audience member, Tom Waits, begin fighting. She says that The Masque venue was shut down due to fire safety code violations. She notes that “the results were disastrous” for The Bags, but in response, the club owner, Brendan, “chose to stand and fight,” and the local community threw a two-day Save the Masque benefit concert. I interpret this passage as a form of resistance by the local community and authorities in order to shut down punk clubs, and since Bag responded to it by supporting the club’s benefit fund and slating her band to perform at the benefit concert, we can see how important the punk rock scene was for her. We know how crucial this defense of the punk rock scene was for the scene’s survival because it has always drawn the attention of local authorities and community members due to wild and aggressive performances. The fact that Bag defended the scene early on in the 1970s cements her position as a pioneer for preserving original punk rock characteristics.

Bag also recalls the time when the police began arresting punk rockers as her band was ending a performance at the Elks Lodge. She says, “I’d sensed this danger many times before; I’d grown up with it all my life. It was the plight of the defenseless in the face of unrestrained power and force. It happened in East L.A. when the L.A. County Sheriffs had gunned down Chicano Activists... (304). She describes that the police treated the punks as “human piñatas” and beat them and dubs this as the moment when “officially sanctioned violence became a part of the L.A. punk scene...” (306-307). Since she immediately correlates the scene to an important moment from her childhood, the violence she first saw at one of the Brown Beret’s protests, she shows us that she believes this case was the same (Armendariz 69-70). Her explanation of the punk rockers as victims of abuse tells us that she believed the community was against the scene and wanted to exterminate it. As so, she shows us that she intends on defending her scene just as

she would defend her Chicana identity in the face of adversity. This defense of both her musical scene's identity and inherently her cultural identity solidifies her role as a pioneer for punk rock music.

Bag's response to this resistance is demonstrated by the punk rockers who formed a "sense of community" in which they supported each other, even if their community did not. She moved in to an apartment which housed punks, allowing them to feel like they owned the place (233). Since we continue to see the importance of community for punk rockers in the contemporary scene, we know that Alice Bag played a big part in this characteristic's development.

Early Identity

Armendariz suggests that her Mexican ethnic identity was an important part of her later identity as a punk rock musician by emphasizing fond memories of her childhood, most which have to do with her Mexican heritage that her parents retain as immigrants. She retrospectively looks back with affection to times when her and her parents traveled to Mexico by train to visit family members and recalls her early Mexican musical inspirations which she says contributed to her development as a musician. With her father forbidding the speaking of English in the home, Armendariz was able to retain her Spanish language skills, which she reflects on with both contempt and appreciation. She includes many specific memories that pertain to preserving her heritage, such as with descriptions of Mexican food her mother made, religious traditions her mother practiced, and the pride she felt after family trips to Mexico. These contribute to an early formation of Armendariz's identity as a Chicana, a Mexican-American rather than a Mexican

immigrant like her parents, where she retains some of the institutions and perceptions of Mexican culture and tradition that her parents embody.

As a child, she remembers the many times her mother cooked traditional Mexican foods. She says, while recalling viewing Mexican films at the theater, that “as the lights went down, we’d start passing our feast around, and before long we were transported to an impossibly glamorous black-and-white version of Mexico. It was escapism at its finest” (13). In her mind, her “version of Mexico” had to do with images of Mexican film plus the traditional Mexican food her mother made. The fact that she explains this as “escapism” shows us that she separates her perception of Mexican culture in Los Angeles and that of the country of Mexico. In this quote, we can see that as a child, she already started to form an identity based on her perception of another culture, where she is aware that she is not explicitly a member of it.

She also remembers her mother preparing *pan dulce* when the family had company over. Later on, she remembers that “gorging on her cooking was a way to solve all problems” (58). Because of this, I believe her retained bits of her Mexican heritage through food as exhibited by her mother, shown by her later expression of how important this food was to her mental well-being. We can be sure that preserving parts of her mother’s perception of her Mexican heritage was important to her, precisely because she continues to discuss memories regarding food as an adult.

Another way Bag was able to preserve her Mexican heritage while growing up is through the duality of religion that her mother imprinted on the family. She says:

“My mom didn’t have much faith in American doctors. Whenever she or any of her children got sick, she’d subject us to the ancient cures passed down by healers or *sobadores*...I used to make fun of my mother... I called her methods *brujeria* (witchcraft)... I thought myself so much smarter than her; it was only much later that I would come around to questioning the supremacy

of Western medicine...Not all of her beliefs grew on me, though. I had been raised as a Catholic, but, as I said before, my mother's brand of Catholicism incorporated elements of Mexican folk beliefs and superstition...I identified more with my father than with my mom." (96-97)

Bag rejected her mother's duality of religion as a child, telling us that she crafted her own identity early on. She uses past tense to note that she "used to make fun" of her mother and "I thought myself so much smarter than her" where she recognizes this early identity which we can see when she says she identified more with her father, who did not follow these religious practices. However, she recognizes that she later realized that these folkloric practices may be helpful. This shows us a transnationalist identity since she combines some of her mother's practices with her own mainstream American views on medicine but she contends that she had been raised Catholic. As an adolescent, she therefore already began forming an identity that contained elements from her mother's perception of religion as well as those from her Catholic education. When she says that she identified more with her father, she tells us that she was not solely a product of either parent, but rather exhibited a mixed identity even from childhood. However, this evidence shows that her mother was somewhat successful in preserving her "brand" of Mexican religious tradition in her family.

Bag was also able to preserve her Mexican heritage through her family's trips to Mexico. She says her summers in Juárez "really cemented my pride in my Mexican heritage. It's true that East L.A. had a fair share of *paleteros* (ice cream men) and elote vendors, but I missed the raspada man and the bird fortunes, and the absence of fighting [between her parents]" (36). She says "the streets of Juarez were alive with a symphony of traffic, songs, laughter, rhymes, colors and the sweet scent of fresh fruit and hot elotes" (35). She also remembers the "delicious-

smelling steamed tamales on paper plates, or homemade *champurrado*” and destinations that even brought out the best in her father (73-74).

The childhood image that she describes of Mexico is romanticized, where by using positive descriptive words such as beautiful, colorful, and delicious, we know that Bag was proud of her cultural heritage. The fact that she separated Mexican heritage as she saw it in Los Angeles from actually being Mexico, and notes that her parents stopped fighting during these trips, shows us that she constantly border-crossed, both physically and emotionally, between these two spaces. Her separation yet participation in both cultures shows us her identity as a transnational subject between Mexico and the US. as a child. We also get the feeling that she yearns to go back, which exemplifies the emotional connection between two cultures described in transnational theory.

According to Smith’s *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital, and Citizenship at U.S. Borders*, diasporas of people living in the United States use transnational lines for financial, cultural, and political support which “frees” them from state oppression (Smith-Sadowski 4). According to Anzaldúa, these “global citizens” represent “democratic individualism” by participating in two cultures and identities (Anzaldúa 39-41). Bag exemplifies this cultural support when she describes how her family during their trips Mexico seemed happier. Sadowski-Smith notes that these diasporic communities maintain familial relationships with home nations, and lead dual lives, speaking two languages. Anzaldúa argues that Mexican-American migrants who arrived in California throughout the 19th and 20th century contribute to a “porosity bridged by transnational ethnoscares” including social, economic, and political participation (Sadowski-Smith 81). We know Bag kept in contact with her family in Mexico by her visiting in Juárez every summer, and we can further see that Bag fits the description of transnational because she

creates her own “ethnoscape” in her mind, comparing two cultures in which she participates, and does this even as a young child.

Ochoa and Ochoa discuss the growing communities of Mexicans in the southwest U.S. due to immigration after the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s, and later under the Bracero Program of the 1950s and 1960s, where migrants worked in U.S. agriculture. Many migrants stayed in the U.S. to earn higher wages and enjoy more economic opportunities, and to send money to family in Mexico, later bringing them to the U.S (67). These patterns continued into the 1990s with the signing of NAFTA, drawing many Mexican women to California to work in the apparel industry (76). Many of these migrants became transnational subjects as a result of their preservation of culture and ties to their home countries. Bag’s early identity was transnational because she participates in two cultures and identities, where she views her identity as a Chicana residing in Los Angeles as different from a Mexican living in Mexico City. We could also call this type of identity binational or bicultural, where she remains connected to both even if she does not explicitly live in each for long periods of time. However, she began to craft her own form of transnationalism, where she chooses which elements of her parents’ Mexican identity she wants to embody, such as her heritage, food traditions, and Spanish skills.

McMahon’s book *Domestic Negotiations: Chicana Domesticity as a Critical Discourse of US Literature and Culture* explains some historical context for Mexican-Americans living in California, where at the beginning of the 20th century, the United States attempted to assimilate migrants into American culture by forbidding Spanish in public schools. This threatened Mexican-Americans’ transnational connection to their home country, where Spanish skills were a symbol of Mexican-American culture (McMahon 62).

Bag shows that she chose to speak Spanish in a monolingual country, which proves an element of her transnationality. She says:

“Uhleesha was my English name. It sounded ugly to me... Miss Gibbons would go on to punish me for not learning English quickly enough...Others had older siblings who spoke English to them, a benefit I lacked since my father prohibited the use of English in our house...So it was the first-generation Americans, like myself, or the recent immigrants – anyone struggling to understand the lessons – who bore the brunt of Miss Gibbon’s ethnocentrism. She treated us like idiots, talked down to us and gave us easy work, as though our lack of English fluency implied we were mentally deficient... (38-39)

Here we see that by choosing to accept her father’s object of his Mexican identity, speaking Spanish, she began to craft her early form of transnationalism. In this way, she identified herself as a U.S. citizen, but one that was bilingual, which went against the cultural blueprint of American society during her childhood. Therefore, she was able to border-cross by speaking a language other than English in the U.S., where she could participate in both Mexican and American society.

She also notes that her early musical inspirations came from Mexican musicians. She says, “seeing and hearing the performances of such greats as Lucha Villa, Pedro Infante and José Alfredo Jiménez almost certainly influenced my own peculiarly emotive style of singing...My older sister and mother preferred teen idol Enrique Guzmán singing ‘*Popotitos*,’ a Spanish version of ‘Boney Marony.’ Many years later, I would sing my own version of ‘Popotitos’ with Mexican Randy and the Metro Squad at a punk show” (42). Later, she says, “At the time, I didn’t realize that Pedro and Rafael had more to do with how I felt about music and performance than did David Bowie, Elton John or Freddie Mercury” (165). In this way, she not only remembers

her parents listening to these icons, which demonstrates their continued Mexican identity, but also realizes how much of an impact they had on her as a punk rocker.

Historically, many Latin American youth groups have utilized rock music, which traveled over borders, to affirm their use of the Spanish language in the face of American English hegemony. According to Hernández of *Rockin' Las Americas*, many Mexicans became involved in the rock scene in Mexico as rock “drifted south” in the 1920s, which they used to protest the current governmental structure (Hernandez 23). In Los Angeles, many Chicanos became involved in the social movements of the 1960s, when Spanish was critical for maintaining ethnic identity. They saw the use of English in American rock bands “imported” to the south as a weapon against Latin American identity and believed Spanish should be incorporated into the rock, where rock music in English and Spanish represented a “cultural fusion” and an “in-betweenness” of two cultures (35). With Bag’s early Mexican musical influences, we can see that she exhibited a type of “cultural fusion” since she applied their performance styles to her punk rock performances in the U.S.

Avant-Mier of *Rock the Nation* discusses the importance of Spanish language in the development of rock music in Mexico where it later mixed with traditional music of Latin America such as “cumbia” and Mexican “baladas.” He discusses the “pachuco boogie” in Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s, and later the doo-wop of the 1960s, an expression of rock in both English and Spanish, which he argues is the earliest example of transnational Latino musical success (Avant-Mier 65). This historical context can be used to understand why Mexican artists had such an impact, though perhaps invisible, on Bag’s formation into not only a punk rocker but a transnational object. Though she did not record or produce songs exclusively in

Spanish, or ones with a combination of the two, we can see that her early source of inspiration represents another aspect of how she formed her own sense of transnationalism as a child.

Challenging Identities

While Bag preserved some elements of her parents' perceptions of their Mexican identity, she later challenged others and represented a feminist consciousness. She discusses memories of her father's abuse of her mother that could cause her to realize her own role as a woman in society where she would never let herself be a victim. She questions her mother's imprint of religion on her, when she challenges ideas of sexuality, representing her rebellion against many of the instructions her parents represent. She says:

"My father was a monster ... One day I was playing outside when I heard yelling coming from the tool room. I ran into the house to find my mother trying to cover her bloodied face in shame... My mother obeyed my father, who then raised his hand to strike her but I rushed over and grabbed his arm... I desperately tried to push him back, using my whole body in a feeble attempt to block him from getting to her... The scene fades into blackness, like so many of my bad memories... My mom never pressed charges, she was afraid to... (19-21)

Here he represents the stereotype of the "macho" man: a strong, aggressive figure who leads the family and is often abusive towards women or his wife. The physical force she used to attempt to protect her mother tells us that she rejected this violence early on, and we can see how this might have provoked her to be an advocate against violence towards women.

As an adult, she has the power to stand up as a feminist in her attempts to create an all-girl band and through her actions in defending herself as a female musician. She says, "Now that I was getting older, I started to see how my mom's actions played into the cycle of violence they were both trapped in. I knew my mom didn't want to be beaten, but I couldn't help but feel that

she was somehow contributing to her own victimization by staying around and pushing my dad's buttons... My mother's inability to act – even to defend her own life – sent my anger rising to the surface” (71-72).

Bag questioned “her role” in the abuse and realizes that this abuse contributes to a “cycle of violence” in her family. As an adult, she becomes conscious of her transnational identity, shown by her realization that she does not want to be a victim like her mother. A Review from the Northampton Review of Latina Books (2015) argues that Bag did not want to be “La Chingada” the stereotypical Mexican woman who accepts the abuse from men. Here, Bag defies the portrayal of “La Chingada,” and the fact that she becomes angry when her mother accepts this abuse shows Bag's new-found ideology as a feminist. As an adult, Bag tells us of a time where her then-boyfriend, Nickey Beat, slapped her. She says:

“‘Don't ever touch me,’ I hiss in a voice that could turn him to stone... I feel powerful and somehow detached from my body... Many years before, I had vowed to myself that I would never be like my mother. I would never allow myself to be victimized” (218-219).

She realizes that she does not want to become a victim, which I interpret as her rebelling against the stereotypical sexist behavior of the men around her, allowing herself to form into a Chicana feminist while developing as a musician. This once again shows us how she refuses to be “La Chingada,” further separating herself from the Mexican-American identity exemplified by her mother.

Early on, Bag attempts to form an all-girl band and surrounds herself with strong like-minded women. While on her high school's cheerleading team, she says, “It occurred to me that they had no goals beyond making the guys [football players] feel good...I quit...” (118). While forming her band, she lives with rocker Shannon Wilhelm, “a strong, assertive woman, intelligent and vivacious,” which “was good” for her (258). While performing with The Pyranas,

she says, “We even made up an all-girl gang... We were just a group of punk girls with edgy dispositions” (259). Later, she says “Sheila and I were both used to being the Toughest Girl in the Room” which I interpret represents Bag’s new persona as “Alice Bag” (265). Here, Bag rejects the community of women who do not reflect feminist ideals of independence and equality, and opts for a different community of like-minded women. She describes this new community as being positive for her, where she began transforming into the “tough” girl, Alice Bag, as seen during her on-stage performances. This shows that she challenged her high school’s expectations and standards of young women, and decided to craft her own.

In another scene, she stands up for herself on the streets of Los Angeles late one night when a group of men begin harassing her. She “stood firmly rooted” to her spot on the sidewalk, “tough as shit, challenging them” like she’d seen the *cholas* (Mexican-American girls; usually represented by aggressive young women) do in junior high school (252). She further develops her own feminist discourse for Chicanas when she realizes that the types of behavior she sees in many women is not what she wants to embody. She then describes her entrance into the punk rock scene, one that contrasts sharply with her parents’ perception of Mexican tradition. For example, she discusses her musical inspirations while in high school and says:

“I’d found myself. Listening to rock music and talking about it felt like I was discovering my way home... rock artists who were pushing against convention... Bowie was openly bisexual, a relatively new concept to teenage kids in East L.A. and one that was very threatening to a culture which preferred clearly defined gender roles... My heroes were artists who defied society with their music, their outrageous clothes and unconventional sexuality. Suddenly, everything was... open to endless possibilities.” (80-81)

This is the point when Bag realizes that she wants to continue with her passion for rock music because she wants to rebel against society and redefine gender roles, just as her childhood icons

did. Bag fully develops into her own consciousness, both as a feminist and as a new punk rocker. Later, she says that she realizes that most of her friends were gay (102) and she even has a sexual experience with another female rocker, Belinda Carlisle (185). She realizes she has the ability to do whatever she chooses as both a woman and a Chicana, where we see that she has rejected familial and societal expectations of her.

Finally, Bag challenges her mother's perception of religion which dictates sexuality and physical appearance. She says her mother believed that:

“Nice girls waited to have sex until after marriage...she had told me virginity was important...It was from reading Cosmo that I finally came to understand that touching myself *down there* had a name; it was *masturbation*, and no, I wouldn't go to hell for doing it... it had taught me that sex and marriage didn't necessarily have to go together...it made me question the double standard which labels a sexually active man 'a stud' and a sexually active woman 'a whore'” (124-125).

She uses phrases such as “it made me question” accepted norms and had “hoped” to be one of those women who used contraception even though the Church officially opposes it. Bag tells us how many external influences opened her eyes to a different definition of sexuality than what is dictated by the Catholic Church. Combining this with her musical icons who pushed the boundaries of gender, such as Bowie and Elton John, we can be sure that her experience as an adolescent represented a break from what her parents or schoolmates may have expected her to do.

When she dates Nickey Beat, she discusses how she went against the patriarchal tactics of her father to control her dating life. Her mother reminded her that he should walk her to the car, and she felt like she was “being treated like a little kid” (220). But, Bag notes that her father's “strong-arm tactics never worked...” and that protecting her virginity was “a lost cause;

my dad was just hoping I'd stay in school." She explains her liberated sex life with Nickey, where she could enjoy sex "à la carte," just as men did (221). Bag quickly rejects her parents' ideas of gender roles and replaces with her own idea of feminism. She challenged these expectations her mother had for her sexuality. Here, we see that this can support her status as a transnational subject because although she preserved bits of her parents' perception of identity, with her own experience, she began to develop her own.

In another passage, she discusses her participation in her high school's liturgical club. The concept of the Trinity was hard for her to understand as it only assigned masculine attributes to God, which she felt was "a distortion of the original concept... The study of religion and the hunger to know more about the nature of God- and to understand my own nature – were subjects that would continue to occupy much of my time and energy for the rest of my life" (129). As a newly liberated woman, she challenges the religious traditions her family intended to impose on her. Yet, she continues to question what she has been taught about God, and notes that she continually strives to know more about God, noting that it will help her understand her own character. This again shows that she learned from her Mexican mother, but was open to new ideas, ones that she learned about while attending an American school.

In *Rockin' Las Americas*, Hernandez notes that rock in Latin America was a way to fight against machismo and subvert the patriarchy through youth empowerment. Many female rockers in Mexico disrupted the gendered status quo of the moralization campaign of honor and virginity of the woman by poking fun at sex and breaking with family morals by using contraceptives (Hernandez 155). Viesca, author of "The Battle of Los Angeles," argues that many Chicanos rebelled against U.S. dependence on Chicano farmworkers and the political repression of Chicano citizens and this led many youth in Los Angeles to join the musical movement of not

only rock but later other genres such as “techno-banda” and “narco-corridos” (Viesca 50). Bag represents this rebellion, albeit in her own way, against the repression she experienced as a Chicana regarding female sexuality and expected behavior. She used punk rock music as a way to disrupt these expectations, because her participation in the scene proves that she did not align with this “gendered status quo” seen in Mexico just before her time.

Other scholars also discuss the many youths of Los Angeles who rebelled against society as a result of the challenges they faced as Mexican-Americans. Walter, author of *Hardcore: The Politics, Identity, and Culture of Color Conscious Punk Rock* notes that punk rock was a medium of expression for people of color in Los Angeles, where marginalized youth join bands to voice their discontent over immigration, racism, and white supremacy issues. Also, “punkeras,” or Chicana punk rockers, sought to disrupt male dominance of the punk rock scene of the 1960s (Walter). Palafox of *Screaming Our Thoughts: Latinos and Punk Rock* discusses Latino bands of the 1990s who created a space for marginalized youth to discuss societal issues that affected them, and encouraged societal action. Bag too joined the scene to express her anger as a Chicana growing up with discrimination and other “cultural politics” such as language hegemony of English the time. Even though the early punk rock scene was not white male-dominated, she undoubtedly carved out a space for herself and her Chicana feminist discourse.

Several reviews of the memoir contribute to understanding Armendariz’s rebellion through music as a product of the social, economic, and political climate of the time period. Haas (2007) writes that economic status affected the everyday life of rockers, where we can see through the memoir that she grew up in a working-class neighborhood with a father who worked in manual labor. Armendariz liberates herself onstage through this “alternative cultural space” where she becomes Alice Bag, a persona separated from her true identity in order to rebel against

society (Sorensen 2014). A review from the Northampton Review of Latina Books (2015) also discusses how Armendariz as an adult in her band did not want to be “La Chingada” in which she viewed her mother as the traditional Mexican woman who accepts the abuse from men. A review from Persephone Magazine notes that her childhood of violence and living in a low-income neighborhood drove her to find her own form of feminism. She responded to the climate of her childhood and her community by rebelling against the expected behavior of the time, both in terms of social status and gender identity.

ANALYSIS OF “LOS PUNKS: WE ARE ALL WE HAVE”

Bag made significant in continuing the diversity and original punk rock characteristics of today in Los Angeles. As Chicana growing up in the U.S., she developed rage against the patriarchal and traditional society in which she came to adulthood. She responded to community resistance by defending the core characteristics of punk rock in the 1970s, such as do-it-yourself tactics, and in the film, we can see that the punk rockers do deal with police confrontation and do their best to defend their lifestyle. She represented some motivations for youths to enter the punk rock scene who came from similar socioeconomic levels, speaking another language besides English, or having immigrant parents which we still see today in some of the rockers’ cases. She demonstrated social bonds that we can see in the film since her and her friends came together support each other and be themselves, and in the film, the punks create a similar community for mutual support. However, new changes have occurred in the contemporary Los Angeles punk rock scene, such as it becoming more diverse to include female rockers and other youths from unique backgrounds.

We also see a historical continuity between Alice Bag's scene and the contemporary scene from the comments by a middle-aged Chicano punk rocker, Jorge Herrera, of The Casualties. In the film, we learn that in the 1980s and 1990s, a style of punk rock emerged known as "beaner rock," and Herrera comments on how this was popular for some, but looked down upon by others (Boatwright 2016). He and his band members describe their musical enclave as something with no previous precedent, but we do know that Chicanos were involved in punk rock as early as the 1960s. As such, the gap between Bag's scene and the scene shown in the film is filled not only with the emergence of unique Chicano bands in Los Angeles, Texas, and New Mexico such as Subsistencia, Emperismo, and Tras de Nada in the 1990s. These bands dealt with political issues of the time affecting Chicanos and Mexican-Americans, such as the signing of NAFTA and California Proposition 187 (1994 ballot proposing to ban illegal aliens from receiving certain public services).

Filmmaker Angela Boatwright contributes to our understanding of the current punk rock scene by primarily observing the actions and events of Los Angeles punk rockers at backyard gigs. The film provides vignettes of the rockers that show the diversity of the contemporary punk rock scene. In an outside interview, she believes that the punk rock scene allows members from disadvantaged communities to persevere in the face of adversity (J Bennett, "Los Punks"). One ought to consider the intellect, creativity, and value of these punk rockers to their community, rather than assuming they are simply products of their disadvantaged environments. At the end of the documentary, we see that some of the punk rockers reject the newfound fame of the documentary and believe it goes against punk rock's ideals which reject institutions. They respond to this "spotlight" on their community in a similar way that Bag did in the midst of police riots of punk clubs in the 1970s, where some community members offered support, and

others continued to look down on punk rockers as disruptive, wayward youth. However, we learn that some are excited about gaining greater success and exposure to the music industry.

Preserving Punk Rock

In the film, we see that the contemporary punk rock scene in Los Angeles has preserved some core elements of punk rock. It is still characterized with aggression, where we can relate the aggressive performances to those of Bag when she performed on stage, thrashing, screaming, and even pushing audience members down off the stage. We also see a continuum of the purpose of punk rock being for the music, not the money, where in Bag's memoir, she never explains much about making money or getting rich from her performances. In the film, we learn that for many rockers, the scene helped them get through rough times, and we know this was similar for Bag when critics like Habell-Pallán note that she positively channeled her childhood anger through her music. And finally, know that the rebellious actions of current rockers parallel those of Bag, where she would often be questioned by her parents why she dressed a certain way.

We can still see aggression in today's punk rock performances in L.A., where the dance style and interaction between punk rockers parallels that of the original punk rock scene. We see raw footage of backyard gigs, where often a circle forms in the "pit" of the audience, where rockers walk in a circle and push and shove each other. We know that many are inebriated because some of the punk rockers are drinking out of large glass bottles of alcohol, and we see on the wall a sign that says "beer: \$2." Gary explains his concept of "la tristeza" when he says "there are a lot of punks in the backyard scene who get messed up, passed out in a corner, drowning in their own vomit..." referring to punk rockers drinking during a gig. The rockers do not always fight but often thrash around as they listen to the music, similar to the "slam dancing"

demonstrated at performances of The Bags. April, 15, a featured promoter of the film, explains that she does this weekly. She says, “being in the pit is like, just yourself, take out your anger, just push people. Like if your mom gets you mad, you can’t do anything about it... just take it out in the pit.” Another rocker, Ray, performs practically naked. In response, Nacho comments, “He pulls it off. He does his thing. And all respects for him,” so we know that his behavior is at least somewhat accepted. Nacho Corrupted says, “in shows, I’ve seen fights, people throwing bottles at each other, stabbings...popping out a bat off of their pants... I got stabbed three times already...missed work a lot...drive-bys, like, crazy stuff.” He does not condemn the activity in his description, but his body language, such as shaking his head and looking away, tells us that violence is oftentimes a hindrance to the bands’ performances, something Bag experienced with her band as well (Boatwright 2016).

One important continuum between the original and the contemporary punk rock scene is the strong connection the punk rockers have with their audiences, where they create a dialogue to vent emotions and frustrations. In Alice Bag’s time, she valued her connection with the audience, where she wanted to create a “catharsis” in concert-goers (Armendariz 7). In this case, she was performing a specific identity that would rival societal expectations of her: she would not be submissive, but will be loud and violent on stage. In this way, her performances were not only a way to connect with her audiences, but since the audiences were generally non-Hispanic and white, she had the opportunity to show members of the dominant culture a rejection.

Interestingly enough, this connection with audience members is also still present in contemporary punk rock, yet their performance for concert-goers reveals a different purpose. Since most of the punk rockers and concert-goers in the film are Hispanic, we know that the punk rockers feel comfortable performing, where they do not need to prove anything. However,

when these rockers are confronted with the outside world, they feel the need to perform an identity to defy what the community thinks of them. For example, when the police show up at Nacho's gig, he calmly and respectfully has a conversation with the officer, but as soon as the officers leave, he returns to his aggressive behavior at the gig (Boatwright 2016). Here we see that he performs two different identities, but the one he performs in front of his audience may not be one meant to reject stereotypes or expectations, but rather one that allows him to connect with other Chicanos in similar situations.

The contemporary punk rock scene in Los Angeles continues to focus on performing for the experience rather than for the money. However, for some rockers, the income gained from performing or collecting entrance fees helps cover living expenses. April says, "How much I can make throwing the shows? Basically, like \$700. I split it with the other guys that helps me out. Whatever I get I give it to my mom, you know, and I help her out with my rent... Most of the bands, they do it for the music, you know, not for the money." Kat, of Las Cochinas, says, "There's a lot of different reason people throw shows. Cancer, sick grandma, funeral, and there's a lot of that going on. Especially like, in the neighborhoods, it's like people don't have that type of money to pay for these things. And the shows raise some money for kids to have for their families..." Nacho, says, "It's not as much about landing a huge record deal or making as much money as it is about pushing music out there and helping people realize there's a music for you." We know that this income is crucial for certain rockers such as April, who is only 15 years old. None of the rockers in the film expresses a desire to primarily make money in the scene. For example, Alex says he enjoys the feeling of the audience getting "up on stage with you with no fear of anything, take the mic and sing your lyrics back to you. It's like a high" (Boatwright 2016). This shows how important not only the performances are for the punk rockers, but also

shows the gratification they feel just to be supported by fans in the audience. Therefore, we can see a continuity of an overall purpose for participating in punk rock that is not solely centered around making money. This is a characteristic present in the punk rock scene of the 1970s, compared to the 1980s and 90s, when more established bands commercialized and started making large amounts of money,

Many in the contemporary punk rock scene give back to the community and become role models for aspiring punk rockers. Luie, proprietor of SCLA apparel, notes that for these rockers, punk rock is a productive and creative outlet to express their emotions. Laura Adams notes that once a week, these rockers come together to scream about the truths of their lives and for some it is a reason to keep living (Adams, “Los Punks”). For Alex, the punk rock community also provided a reason to keep living. He says:

“I began fighting at school...And one day [my dad and I] got into a really bad fight. And he came at me and I had a knife in my pocket and I took it out, and I said, ‘If you take one more step, I’m gonna slit your throat... I [had] the opportunity to go to a psychiatric ward or to juvenile hall. I chose psychiatric ward...I absolutely adore the idea that punk rock was about perseverance rather than giving up or just lamenting in the pain, every day I struggle with depression, and anger, I struggle with trying to remind myself of reasons to live... the band was the reason to keep living... There’s a constructive way to be angry, but still let it out in a productive way rather than do things like what I did...” (Boatwright 2016).

The fact that many rockers shown in the film discuss the scene as aiding them with personal problems tells us that for them, punk rock stands as a beneficial community for some youths in this area. Despite what several commentaries discuss, this scene is clearly not made up of only “hopeless” youth, but we know that it serves an important purpose for many youths (McKenneh-O’Neil, “Slamdance”).

We also see expressions of rebellion in the film that parallel earlier punk rockers. In one scene, Boatwright tells Nacho, “you know someone threw a bottle at my camera operator?” which could possibly be a mode of rebellion against the creation of the documentary as *Vans* funded and supported it. Alex describes his two phases of Mohawk hairstyles and his dad says in response, “I couldn’t stand it... I’d go in my own home I worked my ass off for, and have to see somebody with a Mohawk... ‘either he’s out, or get that thing cut off.’” Gary explains his parents’ initial reactions to his participation in the punk rock scene and says, “When I was 16, 17, [my parents] were like, ‘Where are you going? Why does your hair look like that? Why are you dressed like that?’” (Boatwright 2016). These scenes are expressions of rebellion against institutions as well as against the resistance they youths encounter. All three instances are connected by an act of defiance followed by an act of resistance by someone on the outside, and the rockers’ responses show continued rebellion against institutions or simply those who do not approve of the punk rock lifestyle.

Community Resistance and Response

Another way Bag contributed to the creation of the punk rock scene was in her defense of punk rock against community resistance, where I argue that the resilience of the punk rock scene continues from Bag’s time. In the film, we see helicopters always monitoring the gigs and police violence against rockers, where we can see a parallel to Bag’s defense of The Masque during police raids. We also see resilience in the punk rockers against community threats or resistance, which is what Bag employed while defending The Masque and her fellow punk rockers.

In one scene, the Los Angeles police arrive at a gig and shut it down. They say “everybody out, everybody, time to go!... When there’s resistance like that, we have to shut

down the party, okay? ...Because of people's attitudes and egos." This was specific targeting of punk rockers which assumed harmful behavior at their gigs, because in this case, no crime was committed. Nacho says, "Nobody got stabbed...I was right there the whole time." Instead of this "resistance" towards police, in fact, the rockers who converse with the police do so in a respectful manner. Nacho converses with a police officer at the gig and has a respectful dialogue, amenable to shutting the gig down, and showing deference by referring to the officer as "sir" (Boatwright 2016). we can see that he explains that the event was already shut down, and that there was no more chaos.

In a later scene, a group of punk rockers discuss the police beating up Natalie, Nacho Corrupted's sister. Nacho says, "I literally hit him" and Natalie responds, "I ended up fighting with the cops, though... I ended up like attacking the cop." Nacho says, "the cop actually hit you" and Natalie responds, "I had bruises all over. They fucked me up... like, to the max" (Boatwright 2016). This shows the continuity of a strained relationship between punk rockers and the local authorities, and the fact that the rockers fought back against the police shows us that they will continue to protect and defend their fellow rockers and their scene.

We also see neighbors' resistance to gigs in their communities. The tenant of the apartment above a band's venue says, "this is my place, up here, and that's my yard, all right?... You're trespassing. That's it. I live upstairs." Natalie explains that she "is just bitching" to benefit from the situation by attempting to get the police on her side and says, "We're not doing anything wrong" (Boatwright 2016). This example can show us that the noise and presence of the gigs definitely affects the community around them, and can cast the punk rockers as criminals. The fact that the tenants call the police on these rockers already puts them in this expectation of being criminals, because we see the tenant furiously explaining what the punk

rockers were doing near her property. When Natalie says that the tenant is “just bitching,” we again see a rocker defending herself and her scene, and when Alex comments that the police had a more important call to which to attend, he is trying to tell us that they are not criminals.

In another scene, we see a neighbor grab the microphone at a backyard gig and say, “the next motherfucker that pisses on my house, I got some firecrackers to make motherfuckers disappear,” and April shouts, “I don’t have a penis to piss on your house” (Boatwright 2016). April retaliates in a somewhat mocking voice, can tell us that she does not care much what these tenants say against the punk rock scene. Her comment towards the tenant casts her in an innocent light where she claims not to be responsible for this chaos, and since no other rockers respond to the tenant, perhaps they brush him off as well and continue enjoying the gig. In these two scenes, the rockers show resilience in defending their scene against the community albeit in subtler, verbal ways. Interestingly enough, the rockers who defied authority in this film are both female, who defend the scene and advocate for it during the entirety of the film.

Motivating Factors to Join Punk Rock

Another element of the current punk rock scene that parallels Bag’s punk rock environment is the diverse social environments that may motivate youth to join the punk rock scene. We can connect the experience of some of the rockers with immigrant parents to that of Bag, whose immigrant parents often attempted to instill institutions in her that she did not accept as part of her identity, possibly motivating her to join the punk rock scene. We see diversity in the economic status of the punks’ families, where although some of the rockers in the film do come from very low-income families, we know that Bag did not live in stark poverty. We can also make connections to Bag’s experiences with the domestic abuse of her father which she

expressed this through her music when we learn about the violence experienced by some rockers in the film.

Jennie Kermode notes that these rockers come from “rough backgrounds” such as abuse or economically disadvantaged situations (Kermode, “Backyard Belonging”), and Dennis Harvey, notes that “broken families” drove many youths to become punk rockers (Harvey, “Film Review”). These commentaries assume that the rockers have no goals and are not attempting to remedy their situations. If we consider their motivations by seeing them as subjects who indeed are talented, intellectual, motivated, and creative, we can acknowledge their efforts to make a positive change in their lives. As such, the punk rock scene again serves as a beneficial outlet for many youths.

Not all the subjects in the film come from identical social and environmental situations. Gary, a college-educated youth and a child of immigrants, is employed and on track for law school. Nacho Corrupted grew up with his father and sister to whom he is very close, but lacks the presence of his mother. April formerly lived with her mother, but sought a more positive environment, as she describes her mother as disturbed. Alex did not grow up starving nor was abused, but deals with mental health issues after a sour relationship with his father (Boatwright 2016). These situations represent paths with positive outlooks, where we can understand that although they may come from varying backgrounds with limited opportunities, with the punk rock scene, they can achieve success. Their motivations to join the scene, which indeed may stem from frustration with their environments, do not define their personal character, value, or contribution to society.

One element of the current punk rock scene that continues is that some come from immigrant families. Gary says, “My mom is from El Salvador, my dad is from Guatemala. They

came here during the 1980s, as refugees from my mom, a civil war in ES, my dad, from a military dictatorship.” His mother says, “we are very blessed being here. We are immigrants that are working hard for...to be better” (Boatwright 2016). We can see that his parents instilled a sense of discipline through which he translates into his artwork and academics. His parents’ identity as immigrants to the United States impacted Gary’s sense of identity, where he now has clear goals for himself. We know that he had internal issues as a child regarding his economic status, so we can assume that having immigrant parents may also have created ripe conditions for wanting to join a like-minded community. Natalie explains her upbringing and says, “My father decided that we were gonna come back to the United States...when it came to, like, social skills, it was super hard. Even in a Hispanic community because, remember, these kids are already like second-, third-generation. They’re what we call Chicanos. They’re not Mexicans. And you have, like, two full blown Mexicans here, with like, ‘Buenos días!’ Like, it’s not easy...” Nacho explains,

“I was born in East L.A., but the second week of being born, my father took me to Culiacan Sinaloa and I was raised there ten years...I didn’t know English whatsoever... It was hard, it was like, these people are talking in English. I don’t understand nothing...I knew my mother, but there’s not much to remember...She was in Mexico, I was in Los Angeles. She couldn’t cross the border over here.” (Boatwright 2016).

We can infer that their upbringing affected their sense of identity and participation in the punk rock scene where we can understand the social divide that she felt between her peers. The two might have felt ostracized from their Hispanic community, especially with the absence of their mother who could not immigrate into the U.S. This sense of identity as a “Mexican” in Los Angeles could have been a motivating factor for them to join the punk rock scene to feel accepted by a community of diverse ethnic backgrounds. They also probably feel at home in the

punk rock scene because the majority of rockers are Hispanic. Nacho says, “we’re all Hispanic and it’s true, like, a lot of things that have happened to us, they’re the same things that are happening to their families, their other friend’s families, to their other cousin’s families” (Boatwright 2016). The connection to other rockers of immigrant families most likely allowed these siblings to feel like they were not alone in their sense of identity.

The current punk rock scene also demonstrates the stark poverty that affects some of the young punk rockers. The filmmaker notes that “everyone has a story,” and this ranges from living amongst violence and being unemployed, to having a strong support system and being college-educated (J Bennett, “Los Punks”). A performer in *The Casualties*, Jorge Herrera, explains that “I see myself as part of that because we come from very low income families...I grew up in the streets. I grew up in the projects. My father was a dishwasher. My mother worked in the factory, sewing. Punk rock is, for Latinos that come from the way I came, which is a lot of them, it’s all we have” (Boatwright 2016). Here poverty has affected the career path of a successful punk rocker, though we cannot apply his socioeconomic condition to all other Latino punk rockers. He may be referring to the fact that as a child, he did not have any outlet to express his feelings or any community in which to share his experience, and refers to punk rock as the only way to a positive future.

Gary explains his theory of “la tristeza” and says, “Look at South Central and East L.A. Like, they’re super underfunded education systems. It’s like there’s not enough money for textbooks. There’s not enough money for teachers who are passionate about their job to focus in on one student... ‘la tristeza’: the sadness of living in the hood... everywhere you look, it’s like drive-bys, gang activity, there’s prostitution, ...there’s not a lot of options for people here in the hood... what else are you gonna do but escape?” We understand a possible reason why Gary

chose to participate in the punk rock scene since he has analyzed the social dynamics of his environment and its effect on youth. It is a way for him to understand why he and others chose to participate in punk rock as motivation to “escape” it (Boatwright 2016). This connects to Jorge Herrera’s experience in the punk rock scene, which could explain why he chose to enter it, coming from a low-income family. He says, “my kind of entryway to punk was kind of consciously-oriented... I think it’s an artistic representation of the inner turmoil that we feel inside as working class communities, as people coming from lower-income backgrounds.” He says “we” come from these low-income families, so he is making a connection with other youths in the same situation, further supporting reasons to join the punk rock scene to express themselves. The “inner turmoil” felt by these youths mostly definitely impacts their way of thinking, which can support the rationale of music as an “artistic expression” to release these pent-up emotions (Boatwright 2016).

Another characteristic of the environmental conditions common to some of the contemporary punk rockers is violence. Billy Famine of Withdrawal Symptoms, says, “Where would I be without the backyard scene? I have relatives that are gang members, where I grew up there was a lot of gang activity, that’s one of my biggest fears, like I could’ve been that...” (Boatwright 2016). Famine consciously chose to put himself in a healthier, more positive environment and credits the backyard scene for his current success. He acknowledges that a negative social environment was the impetus that pushed him to seek a positive environment (Boatwright 2016). Alex says “I’ve always been inebriated. One time I drank a quarter gallon of car coolant... I attempted to overdose on cocaine... without the punk rock scene I never would’ve discovered there’s a reason to keep living. That other people felt the same way, that I wasn’t alone” (Boatwright 2016). Alex views the punk rock scene as a positive environment in

which he can thrive. Kurt Gardner notes that the scene helps insulate youth from the tragedy around them, which consists of frequent shootings and stabbings (Gardner, “San Antonio”).

McKenneh-O’Neil’s comments that these youths are “angry, hopeless, frustrated kids” may be inaccurate because there is evidence that shows precisely the opposite. Chicana/o punk rockers describe themselves, as evidenced above, as *expressing* anger and frustration. We cannot assume they are “hopeless.” Alex is determined to become a chef and currently works an internship at a restaurant, working gain the necessary knowledge for his future career. Gary is an employed student and aspiring attorney, where he is not only planning for his future career with his education, but is beginning his financial path by having a job. Jennie, an incredibly enthusiastic disabled rocker, is eager to be involved with the production of gigs. She wears a big smile, and says, “I met new people, it was awesome, they invited me...I love all the bands.” Her enthusiasm is evident through the higher tone in her voice when speaking with punk rockers (Boatwright 2016). In no way does she seem “angry” in personality, even with her disability. Therefore, we can acknowledge that though some of the rockers come from disadvantaged situations, they have bright futures as part of the punk rock community.

Creation of Punk Rock Community

The documentary provides evidence of a strong sense of community among punk rockers who treat each other as family and positively contribute to their community, just as did Bag, where she felt at home in the punk rock scene. Bag explains that the early punk rock scene was highly egalitarian, and everyone felt accepted, even if they were all from the “island of misfit toys” (Armendariz 189). Randall Roberts explains that the “resurgence” of the punk rock scene is comprised of like-minded youth who build and maintain communities (Roberts,

“Los Punks”). This parallels to the current scene where rockers come together to mutually support each other.

We learn about April and Syl’s relationship, where April, 15, lives with Syl, 25, a mother and fellow punk rocker. April learns from Syl and sees her as a mother, friend, and protector. Syl would beat up anyone that messes with April and “has her back.” The two live with two other punk rockers, and April wants to get a job to help out with rent. April even comforts Syl’s young daughter, Alice, and later instructing her to eat her dinner, as a mother would. At the end of the scene, April explains that family does not have to be by blood, but by heart. This behavior mirrors that of a strong family, where these bonds were created upon entrance to the punk rock scene. Alex explains that he views his bandmates as family who have helped him through “thick and thin”: unemployment, mental issues, and feeling of few friends. In the punk rock community, he says “you are not alone.” Danny explains that he feels comfortable because no one makes fun of his spiky hair, black clothing, and studded jackets, and says “all are welcome.” Nacho says that he feels “part of something” where there is camaraderie even though there can be aggression, and that punk rock truly saved his life. Gary notes that the punk rock community can be a system for change, improving society by building a support network (Boatwright 2016). The bonds that the punk rockers build with each other are truly what keeps them motivated to keep going. They use their integrity and creativity to collectively improve the lives of rockers in the scene. When we understand the subjects’ social and economic backgrounds, and do not limit them to these constraints, we see the skills and values they possess.

J Bennett comments that these rockers come together to support each other, even when the bands do not receive much money from performing (Bennett, “Los Punks”). Joshua Brunsting argues that punk rock can help save “troubled souls” like Alex, who struggled with

depression and addiction to drugs and alcohol. He notes the salience of perseverance among the rockers in the face of adversity, where the punk rock community means so much to the rockers that they can truly call it home (Brunsting, “Joshua Reviews”). McKenneh-O’Neil describes the punk rock scene as a “safe space for the lost” where rockers dance, fight, and ultimately form strong bonds with each other (McKenneh-O’Neil, “Slamdance”). However, we must still be cautious when reading these critiques, because they may still assume that these subjects are simply lost souls and misfits in their community, which can assume that they are not valuable or intelligent. These subjects are not “lost,” but directing their energy and creativity. Seen through this lens, the subjects become mediums for change in their community.

Diversifying Punk Rock

Bag also represented new developments of the contemporary punk rock scene before its time. As a woman and person of color, she was a pioneer in setting the precedent for the diverse scene we see today in Los Angeles. This includes diversity in musical genre, socioeconomic status, ability, ethnic backgrounds, and sexuality. In the beginning of the film, Gary explains just how diverse the genre of punk rock is today. He says, “Los Angeles, it’s a really massive city. There’s so many different places within places. And that’s not even mentioning, like, the genre punk. The sub categories, the super sub categories. Street punk, anarcho punk, crust punk, power violence...it’s just a multiplex of different genres out there” (Boatwright 2016). Though the filmmaker only focuses on the specific punk genre of rock in the documentary, the fact that a punk rocker discusses the variety of rock music genres allows us to understand the breadth and depth of the scene.

From an interview which I conducted with Alice Bag, we know that the original punk scene of the 1970s broke off and morphed depending on the location and artists involved. She describes that in the 1980s, hardcore developed on the beaches of California which had a more masculine vibe, and a homogeneity of aesthetic with hack boots and leather. She said that beginning in 1976, punk rock “coalesced,” changing with people from all around California, such as when the Zeroes began to perform in Los Angeles instead of San Diego, because a bigger punk rock audience was forming in Los Angeles. She also noted that the punk rock scene of the 1980s is “referred to as THE Los Angeles punk rock scene” due to the success of bands such as X, The Germs, and The Weirdos who acquired record labels, large fan bases, and commercialized music. She also noted that the “slam dancing” phenomenon of the 1980s was actually not in the original punk rock scene, and instead says that “pogo-ing,” or jumping up and down in the audience, was the original punk rock dance (Bag 2017). These insights from a successful punk rocker of the 1970s validates Gary’s explanation of the multitude of genres of punk rock that exist today.

Finally, Alex explains that the punk rock scene in Los Angeles is accepting of anyone, whether it is a starving mother in the projects with five kids to feed, or an ostracized, educated teen from a middle-class family. Not only does the contemporary punk rock scene encompass and draw a diverse community but also attracts a diverse community in terms of ability. Jennie, 20, an enthusiastic fan, explains that she is disabled as she was born with one arm. This does not slow her down as other rockers do not even notice her disability. In another scene, we see the typical pit forming of rockers thrashing around, and one wheelchair-bound rocker is being pushed around in the circle by another rocker (Boatwright, 2016). Perhaps disabled rockers in the 1970s would have had restricted access in their participation in punk rock, but today, they can

participate in punk rock like anyone else. Jennie Kermode notes that disabled people are accepted in the inclusive punk rock scene as they all have “similar spirits” (Kermode, “Backyard Belonging”).

The punk rockers also represent a diverse composition of ethnic backgrounds. Nacho and Natalie were born in Mexico and were raised in Culiacán, Mexico for ten years, and when they immigrated to Los Angeles, they had trouble even communicating with Chicanos (second- or third-generation Mexicans) as they themselves were first-generation Mexicans. Gary’s parents came from El Salvador and Guatemala, and know that he speaks Spanish with them and has been determined to succeed in school because of them (Boatwright 2016). The contemporary punk rock scene also demonstrates more of an equal status for women. Kat, 24, singer of Las Cochinas (an all-female band) describes a song she wrote called “40 ounce” which is about abusive men. Before her performance, she says “if you hit your girlfriend, come up here and act like the little bitch you are.” In another scene, she says “get over the fact that we’re all girls, and let’s circle the pit like the dudes do” (Boatwright, 2016). This evidence helps to dispel the stereotype that all punk rockers are homogenous (same ethnic background and ability level). We can also see that contemporary punk rock fully includes women, whereas in the 1970s, many still faced sexism upon entry to the scene.

Finally, the film shows the acceptance of more than just heterosexuality. Kat notes that the community is accepting of all genders and sexualities when she says, “who cares if you’re gay? Nobody” (Boatwright 2016). Jennie Kermode acknowledges that the punk rock community has no preference for sexual orientation (Kermode, “Backyard Belonging”) and Laura Adams states that in this scene, no one cares about gender (Adams, “Los Punks”). For these rockers, what is more important is that they come from similar social and family situations and

experiences, so sexual orientation becomes unimportant. The fact that the documentary acknowledges that rockers of non-heterosexual preferences exist shows that perhaps the contemporary scene is even more accepting than it may have originally been. While the original scene, from Alice Bag's perspective, was egalitarian, we see more instances of this, including acceptance of a range of ability level (Armendariz 194).

Observing as a means of Understanding

Boatwright is an observer both interviews with rockers and gigs but also a participant by attending gigs. She chooses specific colors and film effects that represent the chaos in the scene as well. By gaining the rockers' trust, she was able to learn about their distinct backgrounds and motivations for joining the punk rock community. Her use of fragmented stories of each of the rockers contributes to our understanding of the scene as chaotic in many ways: she emphasizes this chaos by using both black and white and color images of the rockers, and flashes quick "still photographs" of the performances at the beginning of the film to give us a brief visual introduction to the scene. We learn important lessons convey which include debunking stereotypes of punk rockers by utilizing the rockers' interviews as "evidence" that these youths use the scene to keep them on the right track in decrepit environments, and contrasts this with violent images of how the viewer perceives punk rock initially. Finally, as we see Corrupted Youth open for a more established band, The Casualties, Boatwright wrestles with the rockers' attitudes towards fame and greater success.

Boatwright utilizes an observational mode in approaching punk rock where she films everyday occurrences of rockers such as April walking down the street, texting, and taking the bus, as well as other rockers gathering in tattoo parlors, backyards, and basements to perform.

She pans to the rocker sitting in front of the camera speaking, where they look her in the eye rather than directly into the camera, as they look right of the camera lens. Boatwright observes these everyday occurrences of the rockers, and learns more about them in one-on-one interviews. Gary explains his theory of “la tristeza” while we see repeated images of the expected aggressive behavior of punk rockers. The fact that she observes these occurrences, but then speaks directly to rockers and allows them to explain, allows the viewer to understand that the scene plays a positive role for these youths. Other than interviews with rockers, there is no commentary. In this way, Boatwright enters the world of the punk rockers and give us a behind-the-scene look at their environments. She utilizes raw footage from performances and rocker interactions, which allows us to look at their community from a closer view. Because of the true images of punk rockers, the viewer can decide for himself how he perceives the punk rock scene after hearing personal perspectives of rockers.

Boatwright employs specific colors, camera effects, and angles to accurately transmit the chaos and resistance to the scene. Ray performs almost completely naked, shown in black and white, then in color. This change of camera filter contributes to an understanding of the scene’s chaos because the change is quick. This could also be a comment on nudity in general, because of the combination of the color exposure and Nacho’s during this scene. Perhaps Boatwright wants to show that nudity should be more accepted in the visual arts, citing evidence that the scene already accepts it. April’s interview conducted with a black background, where the other rockers are generally interviewed outside in a backyard, on the streets, or in their homes. While we hear April’s story of her neglectful mother, we can make a connection between her “dark” past and her present situation, which is undoubtedly related to her past as she lives with fellow punk rockers (Boatwright 2016).

At the beginning of the film, we see Los Angeles at sunrise, with a variety of colors in the sky, but as soon as we see the performances, the filter becomes black and white and we see the blinding lights of helicopters monitoring from above. This change to black and white as an intentional choice to enhance the blinding light from the helicopters, which may represent the local authorities who often shut down these music performances. By enhancing the bright light, we can better understand that these local authorities may be unfairly targeting these rockers and hampering their expressive behavior. Another important color decision is when The Causalities perform in complete red light. Alex explains his ambitions to become more successful with his band Corrupted Youth during this scene, so can interpret the red light as representing his future goals as a musician. It is almost a dream-like state because the filmmaker puts every scene in a normal, white light (Boatwright 2016).

Throughout the film, the camera appears shaky while recording the rowdy performances, most of which are dark with few lights. The discomfort of watching some of the blurry scenes allows us to feel like we are at the performance, experiencing it along with the rockers. We also see footage of police entering a gig, where the filmmaker fast-forwards the film and blurs the image a bit. This is another example of the chaos of police arriving at the gigs, as well as their resistance to the rockers, where the filmmaker may fast-forward the film to show how often police show up. Boatwright employs the tactic of using images which look like gig fliers and “framing” images so they look like physical photos. When Alvarado, a punk veteran, speaks, the filmmaker “stacks” old photos of his band on top of each other, and on the sides, we can see complex designs of gig fliers. In this way, we can see how punk rockers may choose to preserve punk rock through physical fliers (though they now have social media to attract fans) and through physical photos (Boatwright 2016).

Finally, Boatwright gains the trust of the punk rockers in order to get an insider's look into their lives. We know she gained their trust because we see true images of their neighborhoods and daily behaviors such as dirty, crowded alleyways and curious neighborhood children watching the performances from nearby roofs. During the performances, we see rockers drinking out of 40-ounce bottles of beer, smoking cigarettes, and thrashing against each other while they enjoy the music. Through this fidelity and intimacy with punk rock events, we see the filmmaker as a fly on the wall where by gaining trust, she is able to show the real context of the punk rock scene for the viewer who may have preconceptions of the scene (Boatwright, 2016). According to Kurt Gardner, Boatwright gained this trust with the subjects, where she notes that her experience documenting these events was like "tranquility mixed with mayhem" (Gardner, "San Antonio").

The documentary also employs the use of "vignettes" of rockers' stories to give us a range of rockers' points of view so that we understand the diversity of the scene. Nacho and his sister Natalie explain their childhoods. We see images of both rockers as children, as well as images of their parents together. Alex explains his anger as a child and relationship with his father, and we see images of Alex him as a child, then in his graduation cap and gown, then images of the songs he began to write while institutionalized (Boatwright 2016). These fragments of rockers' histories and experiences contribute to a poetic mode of storytelling that Boatwright chose: we see each individual rocker's story occur in a chronological order, but all together, the rockers' experiences create a diverse community of rockers' backgrounds and perspectives.

Another use of chronological order, which displays a possible sense of "normalcy" in the punk rock scene, defiant of what the viewer would expect, is the way she introduces the bands to

the viewer. We see Los Angeles at sunrise, then the environment of a South Central neighborhood, then images of Skeptical Youth, the Otherized, Crusty Drunks, and Withdrawal Symptoms rocking on stage. We are then introduced to the band members explaining their participation in the scene, such as Kat and Billy Famine. Boatwright moves from a general perception of the punk rock scene then closes in on specific rockers to break perceived notions by explaining their motivations and personal attachments to punk rock. Boatwright organizes these fragments in a chronological order and in a rhetorical framework: she sets us up with images of aggressive punks on stage, others drinking and fighting, but then surprises us with the true intentions of the punk rockers through their interviews. This expository mode allows us to see behind-the-scenes that many rockers participate in punk rock to liberate themselves and to give them inspiration to keep moving forward in the face of adversity (Boatwright, 2016). According to Rickey Frankel, this scattered documentary shows us scenes of working-class areas that we would not see on television, therefore exposing the behavior of a community to the viewer (Frankel, "Los Punks Documentary").

Boatwright's method of utilizing evidence and proof conveys her argument that the punk rock scene is more beneficial than harmful to the rockers. In this performative mode, where we see images of police officers entering backyard gigs searching for stabbing suspects, helicopters monitoring behavior from above, and rockers' living situations, we can understand that they are not simply unintelligent, destructive youths. She compares typical images of punk rockers drinking, fighting, and wearing black clothing and makeup, to images of what these rockers deal with on a daily basis: discrimination as rockers, youths, and often as people of color (Boatwright 2016). We understand why they would seek a space to vent their anger and express their emotions with youth from similar circumstances, and we can reject perceived negative attitudes

when we see their aggressive behavior at the gigs. We can sympathize with rockers who can identify with “la tristeza,” where one cannot fault someone for making bad decisions when they are living in an environment not conducive for them.

Bringing Punk Rock to the Public Eye

At the end of the scene, Nachos explain that he wants his bands to become more successful. Yet, there are other rockers against fame and even were against the filming of the documentary (Boatwright, 2016). According to J Bennett, before the documentary was released, Boatwright received negative attention during her webisodes on punk rock because it was “shining a light onto their scene” in a way that felt voyeuristic and intrusive (Bennett, “Los Punks”). Some rockers did not appreciate this attention, shown when a rocker threw a bottle at the camera operator (Boatwright, 2016). We can attribute this negative behavior to rockers who are against institutions, as Vans sponsored the film, and Boatwright notes that her physical presence at the gigs “changed the scene entirely,” especially when the cops showed up. According to Randall Roberts, many rockers were against the production of the documentary as they viewed it as aligning with institutions that traditionally, the do-it-yourself punk rock scene rejects (Roberts, “Los Punks”). However, Nacho expresses his excitement for the future success of their bands. He says, “I wanna tour with my band. I wanna play anywhere we could, any place we could. Coast to coast, everywhere” (Boatwright 2016). He says this after opening for the established band, The Casualties. Yet, his words seem to defy the overall feeling of the rockers towards fame and attention. Because of this, some rockers may aspire to become more successful such as Nacho, who got a taste of professional performing with The Casualties. Boatwright

believes that it is important to show the experience of punk rockers in Los Angeles, as “these scenes need our support” whether they may say so or not (Bennett, “Los Punks”).

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH ALICE BAG

Various interviews with Bag show similarities with punks’ motivations for entering the punk rock scene in East L.A. Through a variety of interviews conducted over email, in person, and recorded on video, we can see more evidence of Bag’s childhood struggles as motivating her to join the scene, which can explain her aggressive performance on stage. As a woman and a Chicana, Bag notes that gender should not determine the legacy of punk rock music. She also discusses her role as a Chicana in the scene, and explains her activism in the community of East Los Angeles today for girls of color.

The physicality of her performance is meaningful for Alice Bag because it gave her a platform to show that she rejected society’s expectations of her (Bag 2011, 2016). In Cory Vielma’s, Rick Castro’s, and Suzy X’s interviews with Bag, we learn that she exhibited a punk attitude in the 1970s, and that punk was “defiant by nature.” She describes punks, herself included, as nails that refused to be hammered down (Bag 2011, 2016). In these interviews, she places herself as an active participant in exhibiting these punk characteristics. These performances were attempt to break up what was expected of her, both from parents and mainstream society such as her high school. In doing so, she demonstrated that she did not have to be the submissive woman that her mom was, nor did she have to assimilate into a white, Anglo society.

Several videos of Alice Bag’s performances give us a powerful visual representation of this physical rejection of societal expectations. Videos by Boulderdamn, Greg McWhorter, and

SuperRyan80 show The Bags on stage in 1978 performing “Babylonian Gorgon.” Bag wears a black t-shirt, black underwear, and black tights with a black garter. She begins by staggering around the stage, then kicks her legs, jumps, shakes, and walks back and forth. After screaming into the microphone, and she crowd-surfs (SuperRyan80, “Babylonian Gorgon-The Bags” and Boulderdamn, “The Bags - Live in Hollywood 1978”). We can see Bag’s aggression as she dresses in all black and wears revealing clothing, an obvious mode of rebellion. When her body starts to almost lose control in the music, she truly becomes “Alice Bag,” her raging alter-ego. The fact that she jumps into the audience tells us how connected she is to her music and performances. From this, we can acknowledge her deeply-rooted participation in key punk characteristics.

Many of her lyrics can also give us a sense of her inner thoughts, relating to society and politics of the time, during her performances. She sings:

“she’s out of place...poisoned with blood when I’m pissed...don’t be fake...don’t want private lives, industrial lives, politician dreams, psychodrama schemes...don’t want or need the seed you sow...get outta my way, I’m ready to go... rip up your idol’s photograph, they do it all just for the laugh” (SuperRyan80, “Babylonian Gorgon-The Bags”).

These lyrics may refer to herself, where she becomes “poisoned with blood” and “out of place” because growing up as a person of color, she had trouble in school learning English, and experienced discrimination in her school, so she found the punk rock scene to be accepting of her. When she refers to the “lives” and says “don’t be fake,” this could represent a classic characteristic of the punk rock scene of rebelling against societal institutions. “Industrial lives” could refer to middle- or upper-class people, and “politician dreams” and “schemes” is a direct reference to the politics her time, which may also reference the discrimination she sympathized with when she witnessed the Brown Berets protesting in the Chicano movement (Armendariz 69-

70). She says she does not want the “seed you sow,” which can represent the sexual liberation in the scene. When she says “get outta my way” we know she is talking about her anger and attitude as a punk, since punks take things into their own hands and enjoy their liberties. She calls on the audience to rip up their idol’s photograph, presumably idols which did not represent gender fluidity like her own idols did (Bowie, Elton John), where she may be calling on youth to look to new, different idols than what is expected (SuperRyan80, “Babylonian Gorgon-The Bags”).

The ability to vent pent-up emotions from childhood for Armendariz was also a purpose of the physicality of her performances. In interviews by Niina Pollari and Christine Hale, we learn that the punk rock scene was an outlet for her anger as a child, where she felt caught in a “crossfire” between her parents (Bag 2012, 2007). She also recounts how punks took things into their own hands to threaten the status quo and question authority (Bag 2012, 2007). Through these interviews, we can draw a possible impetus for Bag to join the punk rock scene, and understand that it was natural for her to want to express her emotions in an artistic outlet. Therefore, her physical demonstration on stage not only represented a rejection of societal expectations but also served as an outlet to express emotion. We recognize that her participation in the punk rock scene was meaningful, allowing her to stand out as a key figure in punk rock. Interviews by Life Reimagined, Fuse, and Erin Lyndal-Martin also expose us to these negative childhood memories (Bag 2015, 2016). Armendariz states that performing on stage was “a chance to release all” the pent-up feelings from seeing her mother abused. She wanted to represent a threat to the patriarchy and wanted to break the cycle of oppression of women (Bag 2015, 2016). Here we can again draw a correlation between her painful memories and her behavior in the punk rock scene, where we understand that her angry performances had a

purpose. By acknowledging that she was in fact fighting for a great purpose through her “punk attitude” and rebellious behavior, we can see her as an important and contributing subject in the development of punk rock.

Armendariz’s development into both a punk rocker and feminist activist shows her great contribution to the diversity of the scene. In interviews with Pollari, Fuse, and Signs of the Time, Armendariz describes how she surrounded herself strong, inspiring women in her own female band, inspired by Patti Smith, rather than just being a groupie (Bag 2012, 2016). She performed in her second band, Las Tres, which dealt with feminist and social problems of the time period, allowing them to challenge expectations of women in the punk rock scene. This again allows us to acknowledge Armendariz’s activism and purpose, where she fought for a greater cause through the outlet of music. By creating an all-female band, she represented not only rebellion against the status quo, but stood for the possibilities for the punk rock scene, attempting to increase women’s participation in it. In interviews with Cory Vielma and Rick Castro, she says that the “legacy of punk is not determined by gender,” where in contemporary times, women have greater roles and independence in society (Bag 2011). Through these comments, we can acknowledge that Armendariz carved out a space for women in the scene, and that her legacy has continued into contemporary punk rock. The fact that many subjects in the film *Los Punks* are women causes us to refer to her as a precedent for this occurrence. This undoubtedly allows her to rise as an influential subject in early punk rock, where she stood for women’s rights during a time where women were not always associated with being punk rockers.

Representing a minority in the early punk rock scene was not discouraging to her. Rather, it fueled her to become a Chicana advocate in contemporary times. In her interviews with Hale, Signs of the Time, and Cory Vielma, she notes that being a Chicana in the scene did not cause

her to be treated differently, yet in her school, she was looked down for her heritage and bilingual ability (Bag 2007, 2011). This speaks to the initial acceptance of diversity in the scene, and the stark contrast she makes to her school system gives us insight to how discriminatory it was and may still be. We therefore acknowledge how beneficial the punk scene was for her, which reminds us of the benefits we see in the contemporary scene. Bag also discusses in these interviews her activism in local neighborhoods in East Los Angeles for young Chicanas. In an interview with Lyndal-Martin, she explains that organizations for Latinos in East L.A. did not exist when she was growing up, so she organizes a group of Chicana women bike-riding club, allowing them to express themselves and make them visible to their community (Bag 2016). She also yearns to inform her community of the large Latino presence, where she wants to initiate an open discussion with her neighbors (Bag 2016). Here we see that she continues in her attempts to preserve not only her Mexican heritage but that of the community around her, which is being threatened by Anglo groups attempting to diminish their culture. Since she took what she had learned from the early punk scene and applied to today, benefitting the community, we know she is an important figure in both original and modern punk rock.

The sense of community and mutual support Armendariz received from the punk rock scene shows that it was and still is beneficial for youths. In interviews with Pollari, Signs of the Time, and Antebellum Blog, she notes that she felt empowered as a member of this community, and could steer her own life (Bag 2012, 2011). The members of the punk rock community supported each other in many ways and viewed her own place in the punk rock community as “small but significant” (Bag 2012, 2011). By participating and contributing to this supportive community, one that continues to exist today, she has truly made her mark on punk rock. She has

taken this a step forward in giving back to youths today, through activist and music groups, where she recounts her experience as a punk rocker and wants to continue making a difference.

In 2016, Armendariz released a song called *Modern Day Virgin Sacrifice*, where she advocates for women and girls defying gender expectations (Don Giovanni Records, 2016). In the video, teen girl sits on her bed reading a magazine which features thin, white, beautiful blonde women. She looks in the mirror and tries on clothes, making faces at herself, and picking out her imperfections. This scene black and white, but as Bag begins to sing, the filter colorizes. The camera switches to Bag singing outside in a large lot, wearing a black and white dress with black hair and black eyeliner. Behind her, girls of all sizes, colors, and styles dance together and sing. At the end, the teen rips up the magazine she was reading and jumps on the bed, accepting and even embracing her imperfections. The beginning of the video may reference Bag as a teen girl, as it is in black and white, a possible flashback to her adolescence), and because she is sizing herself up against the beauty standard of white women because she felt like a misfit while growing up as a woman of color. She may be reconstructing her body image and weight struggles as we see this teen making faces at herself in the mirror and trying on clothes to make herself appear thinner. When the camera pans to Bag singing, we see her rebellion represented by her black clothing, and we see more of the anger she emits on stage. The group of younger girls forms behind her may reference the community of women she cultivated with her fellow female rockers such as Shannon and Patricia. She shows us that she supports young girls accepting their imperfections and celebrating their diversity, where they all dance and sing together in the video. We can infer that this is meant to represent the diversity of both men and women in the punk rock scene, especially one that is demonstrated today in contemporary punk rock, to which she contributed as a woman of color.

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